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***Chosi Ntsomi!* Making a Xhosa theatre identity by adapting Nongenile Masithathu Zenani's folktale about a rite of passage for Xhosa girls**

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A minor dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of MA in Theatre & Performance (Theatre Making)

**COMPULSORY DECLARATION**

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and in quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Signature

Date

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## **Abstract**

Inspired by the performativity of Xhosa cultural belief systems, my study aims to develop dignified theatrical roles for African women. This essay explores the potential of perceptions of Xhosa cultural women, configured in oral storytelling, as a means towards developing a base for Nguni theatre. This explication speaks to the capacities of African women models in re-shaping an ancient storytelling tradition for the development of South African theatre. The focus is on the recordings of a late matriarch, Nongenile Masithathu Zenani's storytelling sessions in Xhosa and the possibilities these present for a post-apartheid and postcolonial South African theatre stage.

This research traces the boundaries set by the Xhosa culture, first on women, and secondly on performance. It unlocks the meaning and the significance of traditional song and dance, space, audience and stage properties, and the actual and potential uses of each of these aspects in making an Nguni classical theatre. The explication develops a vocabulary for theatrical performance derived from a rural South African perspective and explored in an urban setting. It establishes commonalities between the stories - narrated and performed - and the audience, concerning issues pertaining to (Xhosa) womanhood in post-apartheid South Africa.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD.....	5
INTRODUCTION.....	6
METHODOLOGY.....	11
THE THESIS PRODUCTION.....	12
The circle.....	13
Gender ideas from Nojikolo's perspective.....	16
The spoken word.....	21
Word as harmony.....	23
On the mythical realm.....	26
CONCLUSION.....	27
REFERENCES.....	30
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	30

## FOREWORD

This research is inspired by a personal quest to tell herstories of black women in Africa, with specific reference to Xhosa women. This researcher aspires to embrace his ancestral roots through theatre and performance. The study honors the ancestral intellectuals, artists, painters, carvers, hunters, oral artists, spiritual teachers, as well as mothers and fathers. The research does not intend to criticize Xhosa culture but rather to tease out its theatrical elements to create an identity for a classical Xhosa theatre. It aims to address post-apartheid and post-colonial issues that are affecting the identity of the contemporary generation of Xhosa performers and intends to strengthen the roles of, and for, African women in the first place, and thereafter men.

This research investigates Xhosa oral literature, taking the Ntsomi and locating it within contemporary theatre. It asks pressing questions regarding the direction African theatre-making is taking.

This research is imaginably a continuation of a theatre revolution in South Africa that continues to carry a racial stigma. However, if theatre is one big weapon that was used to transmit the voices of protest against apartheid around the country and abroad, then surely it can have a significant role now in addressing local social issues in this democratic country.

Mostly, the research is about giving praise, and acknowledging the African theatre goddesses that blessed our ancestors with creative life, because the quest is to make theatre that primarily addresses issues of the mother-continent. It aims to locate where a young African theatre-maker's contribution could lie.

Consequently, what is now the equivalent of theatre in our pre-colonial African heritage? The research investigates Xhosa cultural concepts of performance practiced by people who hold a distinctive view of what Western terms such as culture, performance and so forth, entail for Africans in South Africa now, by engaging with the imagination of the storyteller who offers particular physical, vocal and aesthetic paradigms to the creative process.

This study intends to foster an accessible theatre language through remembering, recouping, and reconstructing a storytelling tradition, which developed over many years with women at the heart of the process. It examines the implications of this in contemporary performance language with particular reference to women. The study acknowledges the time lived then and interpreted now, by generating

debate within the theatre audience about the story's theme. This involves audience participation which can affect, and possibly even determine, the direction the production takes.

This paper also explicates the symbolic aspects of the theatre setting that influence the impact of the story.

## INTRODUCTION

What is the reason for such research? It is to create a classical Xhosa theatre vocabulary. The best way is to start afresh and take into consideration that this continent is customarily addressed as a woman. Hence is it important to consider why this 'young-straight-South African-black-male-theatre-researcher' is interested in telling women's stories? This question is best answered by citing Dove; "Africana womanist theory critically examines the limitations of feminist theory and helps to explain, comprehensively, the ideas and activism of some African women who have contributed to womanist theory from differing ideological perspectives" (Dove, 1998:516).

The Xhosa culture does not endorse abuse of women by men. For example, proverbs such as *induku ayinamzi* (violence leads to a broken home) exist to discourage domestic abuse performed mostly by men on women. However customary practices, and education governing cultural beliefs, are seldom practiced in the urban areas and this clouds the understanding that the traditional cultural lessons offer. Whilst contemporary men encourage boys to go for male initiation so they can fully claim adult identity, this is not the case for girl children. Instead boys continue to perceive women as male possessions to which their surviving initiation education has taught them they are entitled. This essay will look at cultural lessons, inherent in the folktale, which are embodied in the thesis production.

One of the roles of the theatre-maker is parenting the production, and every theatre-maker has a responsibility to address contemporary social issues, without gender preference, as a sexist theatre can further divide an already broken society, and so the product must speak to every child. Furthermore, the cultural role of African women is slowly eroding, in part because of a lack of understanding of how initiations like the Xhosa *iJaka*<sup>1</sup> affect African women's self-

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<sup>1</sup> IJaka is the name of a Xhosa female initiation ritual that is meant to take place on the onset of a girl's first menstrual period.

discovery and education. Xhosa culture has suffered many disasters arising from bloody clashes like *mfecane*<sup>2</sup>, the *frontier wars*<sup>3</sup> and the prophecy of *Nongqawuse*<sup>4</sup>. Such incidences are symbolic of the destruction of Xhosa land and its peoples, and have also had a corrosive effect on the perception of Xhosa women.

This study intends to foster a cultural movement that will re-imagine African women in terms of Nelson Mandela's concept, 'rebuild Carthage' (OAU, 1994). It represents a theatrical attempt to rebuild the identity of African woman by imagining the steps that built her character in ancient times. *Mbengu-Sonyangaza ndakwenz'int'embu*<sup>5</sup> is an adaptation of a tale about a young Xhosa Princess, who later on in the story becomes known as Nojikolo, after paying little heed to her initiation (Zenani 2006a). This essay interrogates the meanings implicit in the story and examines how the protagonist exemplifies problems facing Xhosa women. Hence the project intends to reinforce the status of a South African black women and black women actors by using timeless Xhosa folktales to explore the identity and role of women in post-apartheid South Africa. Perhaps this intention is best described in Dove's words: "My contribution is to further emphasize the concept of culture as a tool of analysis for understanding the nature of African women's experiences. I specifically address culture as a weapon of resistance and as a basis for defining a new world order" (1998: 518).

This research aims to fill a void in the theatre and performance mainstream in South Africa. The current, worrying political climate is one reason soul theatre must help shape this country. Some of this country's stories have not been told. Whether because of distaste, censorship or lack of interest, a wealth of untold stories, which remember a time long passed, have deliberately been hidden from memory. "According to the missionaries, *iNtonjane*<sup>6</sup> threatened social morality. It led to a 'demoralization of both sexes which ... is the chief impediment of ... civilization'" (Erlank, 2003:943).

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<sup>2</sup> Mfecane also known by a Sotho name Difaqane or Lifaqane, was a period of widespread and warfare amongst the indigenous tribes of Southern Africa from 1815 – 1840.

<sup>3</sup> The Xhosa wars, a series of wars between the Xhosa people and European settlers from 1770-1879.

<sup>4</sup> Nongqawuse (circa. 1840-1898) was the Xhosa prophetess who claimed that spirits had told her that the Xhosa people should destroy their cattle and kill their crops in return the British settlers would be swept into the sea. The resulting famine led to the death of thousands of Xhosas.

<sup>5</sup> Zenani's story entitled *Mbengu-Sonyangaza saves his sister* (2006a) is adapted as *Mbengu-Sonyangaza ndakwenz'int'embu* (Tshazibane 2012).

<sup>6</sup> INtonjane is the female initiate.



The inability to express ideas that stem from one's African culture renders them inaccessible. This makes theatre a crippling experience for those who are victims of the supremacy of Western value systems at the expense of African values. But how is one's African culture related to one's performance ability? Or to one's ability to grasp a performance when the language used is "foreign" to some of the audience? Do African performers care to use their home languages and heritage on stage nowadays? If the answer is yes, what is drama or theatre to Africans? Who is African and what qualifies one to be known as such? What and who is Xhosa?

These issues resurrect all the tensions between generations which my chosen folktale embodies, as the current storytellers have been socially, politically and geographically removed from the world where *uMakhulu*<sup>7</sup> herself was born and educated through her familiar storytellers. If this continent is referred to as 'Mother Africa' then this research suggests that African woman should be the focus of theatrical creativity. The problem for South African theatre-makers has been the fact that they have removed black women from being the face of this country. This essay acknowledges the black woman's powerful and positive role in history as it was captured in Nongenile Masithathu Zenani's storytelling and investigates the need for a positive performance energy that is female and the source of black creativity. If the past millennium has been dominated by patriarchy, perhaps more significant theatre creativity should favor matriarchal energy.

Whilst Nguni oral storytelling is an active performance practice of some African women in South Africa, such performers are presented or present themselves as talking heads, who use words to connect with audiences and often leave the stage as excellent entertainers. However I have been frustrated at not being able to dialogue with such storytellers in performance, which in part has provoked my research into engaging with audiences.

Nguni theatre-makers are encouraged by the culture to concern ourselves with social responsibility in whatever we do. We have constantly to ask ourselves: what are we doing to better each other's lives? This led me to search for my role in life through theatre-making. I was introduced to Professor Harold Scheub's work (2006a, 2006b), which elevates the stories of South African women like

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<sup>7</sup> Xhosa word for grandmother

Nongenile Masithathu Zenani<sup>8</sup> and their contribution with irreplaceable storytelling creativity. This presented exciting theatre-making opportunities for a young researcher as it presents Zenani as a mother of the nation who keeps her people united by [her]story. Creativity seems very possible when perceived through the imaginable eyes of an African woman.

My study aims to access a universal language through the Nguni culture and more precisely through the Xhosa oral tradition. I aim to investigate Xhosa cultural significance in South Africa in relation to theatre and performance and look at how some of the outcomes of our country's struggle can be interpreted in the theatre of this country. More specifically I aim to locate the African woman within the Xhosa culture and create a new ground for a theatre that favors her as the 'mother of Xhosa drama'.

Other than township theatre which has almost always focused on urban experience, theatre in this country has not contributed enough, or broadly enough, about the lives of its black majority particularly those in rural areas. I aim to examine Xhosa oral history and literature in relation to our contemporary, democratic South African nation. It is time to ask searching questions of ourselves regarding where and how we are headed regarding theatre-making. Nguni theatre-making creativity, by and about African-related issues, deserves to be taken seriously in this time of new beginnings.

The overall message of Zenani's tale (used for this production (2006a)) was interpreted as *nokuba abazali bangangathini xa umntwana wabo esala ukuya eJakeni. Wothi abone apha ekuhambeni kwexesha kubomi bakhe ukuba uyakudinga ukuya eJakeni okanye hayi. Isiziba siviwa ngodondolo*. [Whether or not parents speak to their children about this initiation, the child gains the insight to choose whether or not they go through this initiation. Look before you leap].

My reasons to adapt this tale reside in this statement: *Ingaba isizathu sokudeleleka koodade kungokuba besezi ntombi zamakwekwe?* [Are some Xhosa women disrespected by their own because they are regarded as of lower status - as uninitiated girls and boys are known to be?]. Those that do pass this stage normally return overweight - signifying a new persona and having a dignity that makes them look older and wiser. Those who are initiated are ranked as senior in

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<sup>8</sup> Described by Ken Frazer as the "most influential and the greatest storyteller Professor Harold Scheub encountered in all his South African travels" in Scheub's 2006 Vol. 1 preface.

broader cultural society, whilst un-initiated boys and girls stick together in their age cohort. Zenani's tale concludes that the Princess should get initiated into womanhood after she had gone through the ups and down of her youth. Zenani, as a wise old Xhosa woman that she was, supports this initiation. Possibly the Princess' parents decision to wait and see if their girl child needed to be initiated, before isolating her, *eJakeni*, was based upon their aspiration to raise their children in an equal manner, because the behavior of the boy child would be the leading factor towards the decision of isolating him in the mountains for initiation. In Zenani's tale, it is after a series of Nojikolo's ups and downs that her parents, and particularly her father, voiced his opinion. If in Falola's words culture is,

Values, beliefs, text about beliefs and ideas, multiple daily practices, aesthetic forms, systems of communications (e.g. language), institutions of society, a variety of experiences that capture Africans' way of life, a metaphor to express a political ideas, and the basis of an ideology to bring about both political and economic changes (2003:1).

then a Xhosa theatre can make a vital contribution to the current South Africa. And if this country has adopted Nguni terminologies like *ubuntu*<sup>9</sup> it can only be expected that research about the term will become a way to create a platform where *ubuntu* is played out.

The past reveals more of the present and so it is vital for South Africans to look back beyond the past eighteen years to reflect upon the now. This research aims to contribute to debates that emphasize and / or question the importance of cultural identity for all Africans especially. This essay aims to investigate Xhosa cultural significance in South Africa in relation to theatre and performance. Falola argues that: 'Culture is a dynamic process, and Africans have had to deal with multiple changes and their outcomes' (2003:2). This research is my way of dealing with these changes and outcomes and it comprises the construction of both a personal and a public identity of a Xhosa theatre-maker. This research also contributes to the dynamism of culture by taking a traditional form of art and fusing it to elements of another performance culture that can make this form stronger.

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<sup>9</sup> Xhosa word meaning humanity adopted by the South African government as a theme for unification

## METHODOLOGY

I am therefore bound by culture to retrieve Xhosa ancestral knowledge of performance, and from that imaginary world, style it into a contemporary theatre performance. This essay looks at Xhosa cultural motifs and themes with *iNtsomi* as the source,<sup>10</sup> and how such can be reworked into Xhosa classical theatre. It discusses the replacement of *uMakhulu*, grandmother who is chief storyteller, with stage artifacts that symbolize her presence, while her students, her grandchildren, assume the mantle of her storytelling and enact the characters in the story in her memory. The substitute for *uMakhulu* is not disconnected from, but is an illumination of her energy evoked in the space before, during and after the tale. It can be said then that the symbol of the hanging skirt is a commitment to retaining *uMakhulu*'s spirit as the source for Xhosa theatre's creativity. In that case, it can be expected that the approach on the floor contained an exploration of teased out Xhosa cultural symbols that perhaps evoke traditional society's belief systems, such, for example, as *iNtlombe* (Zenani 2006b).<sup>11</sup>

This research is about retrieving a cultural education from *uMakhulu*'s (in this case Zenani's) vision, which is narrated and interpreted for the benefit of her grandchildren. This resurrects all the tensions between generations as the current storytellers have been socially, politically and geographically removed from the world where *uMakhulu* herself was conceived and connected with her educators through storytelling. The quest for this research is not only to re-tell Zenani's tales but to engage the storytellers with the audience in a dialogue about the main theme of the tale. This dialogue is what raises awareness between both parties about the state of affairs in their country. The strategy is to re-create a storytelling session where the storytellers collectively tell the same tale and enact key parts of the story to an audience who are seated according to gender, as closely around the stage as possible. The storytellers present the cases that Zenani presented forty-five years ago and seduce the audience into contributing their views to the argument. *uMakhulu* [grandmother who is chief storyteller] is replaced with provocative symbols like a leather, traditional Xhosa woman's skirt, which was lowered from the ceiling onto the stage at three different points in the production.

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<sup>10</sup> A Xhosa traditional storytelling event.

<sup>11</sup> A Xhosa young and old people's spiritual gathering during which songs are sung for each other and/or in memory of their ancestors. It normally takes place from sunset and is performed through the night until sunrise (Zenani 2006b).

This substitute for *uMakhulu* is not disconnected from, but is an illumination of her energy evoked in the space before, during and after the tale.

The approach on the floor embodies an exploration of Xhosa cultural symbols, songs, gestures, and beliefs, to evoke a response to traditional society's belief systems. This method seeks to create a socio responsive South African theatre style, in which the performer is firstly a narrator and secondly is also transported into heightened vocal and physical expressivity that this method demands.

Whereas, in the traditional set up of *iNtsomi*, the storyteller does not necessarily have to make these drastic physical shifts and is rather encouraged to transform only her vocal patterns. Xhosa storytelling brings together a number of aspects of general skills development for the performer, and mostly focuses on the performer's presence. This is vital because the storytelling technique demands that the performer maintain her focus; particularly when her energy is transmitted beyond the storytelling circle into the audience for a debate. The aim is to create a relevant Xhosa theatre language that compels the audience to participate not only by clapping or singing along with the songs, but also in the discussion about certain cultural experiences. The audience participation can get out of hand if focus is not maintained and that focus is even more necessary once the performance resumes. This discussion is meant, not only to take the story forward, but also to bring to life 'community' within the country.

## **THE THESIS PRODUCTION**

Production Adaptation Name: Mbengu-Sonyangaza ndakwenz'int'emb!

In the search to find a story that challenges the black theatre-maker, this tale from Zenani's collection has a lot of layers that seem relevant to many nowadays (2006a). The tale revolves around the rite of passage for Xhosa girls and unfolds how, once upon a time, a Xhosa princess responded to her parent's call to undergo this initiation. The initiation is known as *iJaka* and the initiate as *iNtonjane*

At the heart of the tale in performance is a debate around the themes that the tale is grappling with. The debate is marked by questions relating to the tale's themes, and which the dramaturge is playing with, and are addressed by some members of the cast to the audience. The cast answers none of the questions, as the idea is to create a platform for everyone in attendance, particularly the audience, to voice their opinions about the matter at hand.

The time of the actual performance is a time for honoring the present in the theatre. It is about collecting all the voices that are present in a theatre and using the tale to shape them. It is also about claiming a past time in the present moment: connecting with the past, now. The debate is also in order to use theatre to dignify the present time and focus present energies from both performers and the audience towards the same issue at the same time, therefore giving birth to the energy of the tale as a whole.

The debate is also prompted by the tradition that after every tale those in attendance would have to state what the moral of the story is. Every tale is expected to raise a lot of themes, depending on the persons listening, and so the debate at least highlights what both the cast and the dramaturge had in mind in relation to the audience. The questions depend on the central theme of the storytelling.

The time during and in performance locates what my responsibilities as a young theatre-maker are today in this country. It profiles the expectations that accompany this research. The performance is the heartbeat of this research. It is a metaphor for the kind of hospital our society is and marks the rebirth resulting from this research.

### **The circle**

The most obvious aspect of the use or adoption of a circle in Nguni theatre is the structure that theatre in the round offers in general. Nguni theatre is public theatre and it can be defined by the role it plays in the social structure. This is drama that mirrors and improves the ties of a particular cultural group of people and offers them an opportunity to debate and or reflect on their modes of living. The circle offers the audience and performers a stage on which to have an equal involvement with matters that arise in their society.

There are politics that come with the circle and this is reflected in the production. The circle is a complete entity and given a female gender for the purposes of this production. The stage was given a shape and color that resembles that of the moon to enable the lighting to bounce off it, onto the performers, and be more comfortable to the eye. The circle is also chosen to be one of the Xhosa traditional performance spaces. Xhosa houses, rondavells, are made of wattle and daub or mud bricks that form a circle and are completed with thatched roofs. The rondavell serves as a main point of reference that informs the *theatre-making*, mostly

because it is more accessible than the actual moon. The entrance of a rondavell is always facing the direction of the rising sun; east. The relationship of the characters in the space is directly proportional to the relationship the characters have with the sun.

*AmaXhosa* [the Xhosa nation] have an interesting relationship with the central point in the space. The clearest example is that of a fireplace, which is always the centre point of the dwelling space, especially when it is viewed in relation to the four equal points away from the center that the compass refers to as North, East, West and South. These four directions intensify the energy of the central space and enable the performer to place herself in the center and to channel her performance outwards to the rest of the world. This view of the circle gives the performer, who is the agent of culture, an opportunity to see herself as a spark shining to the rest of the globe.

Xhosa performance is about manipulating one's energy or negotiating with its source privately, and the performers are asked to link their characters with an ancestor related to them by blood. The assumption is that Xhosa performance is hereditary, and instead of mounting a character the performer is encouraged to access it internally.

The argument about the circle is the argument about femininity. It is connected to the cycle of life and women represent this life cycle perfectly, particularly in this tale that favors women's issues. However, because Xhosa culture does have places earmarked for both genders, the circle is shared by both genders. Facing the direction of the rising sun, men occupy the area outside, (in this performance space which is UCT's Arena Theatre) downstage center, to as far West as possible, and women do the same as far East as the seating goes. This seating gives the performer the opportunity to push her energy out against the energy of the audience. This energy becomes more significant in such gendered and confronting tales as oftentimes the responses came from one side of the auditorium. Nonetheless the circle forces both men and women to take ownership of the time together as it uncovers the secrecy that other Xhosa performance spaces provide. The circle is not easy to fully connect with in contemporary times as even in rural Xhosa villages these rondavells are set out in straight rows as it is the case in the urban areas. Whereas traditionally, the structure of *uMuzi*<sup>12</sup> can be

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<sup>12</sup> Nguni rural homestead with all the houses and cattle enclosure in the a round shape.

viewed as a small village in the round, it is this structure that suggests the shape of an Nguni performance.

*AmaGqirha* [traditional healers] consider space according to the energy it possesses and also due to the fact that culturally the energy in the space characterizes the ancestral spirits that are believed to inhabit that particular space. The connection of the performer, audience and the word is directly proportional to the energy of the space. The performer, like the traditional healer, places herself in the middle (as opposed to front) and narrates the energies present in the space. The ability to manipulate these energies is what constitutes a performance. There is a sensitive relationship between a Nguni theatre performer and traditional healers (constituted mostly of women), and although that is not the focus of this paper it deserves its due acknowledgement.

The circle is therefore crucial to the directorial interpretation of dramatic action and it may be used to punctuate the drama. The director might choose to use the circle to highlight significant points in the story. In other words, the circle is not just the circular rostrum in the middle of the stage but it is also a possibility to emphasize the character's psychological or emotional state or the climax of the play.

The circle can also operate as a performance ring, which, when used, creates a border between the performer and her audiences. This applies to those instances where there is a need for outsiders and insiders during performance i.e. when the outsider is allowed or excluded from taking part in the performance. In other instances there are no outsiders and it is expected that unknown performers might join the performer in a dance sequence, for example. In other words the circle is inviting the audience to interact with the performers in performance. It is also a frame that can be alienating to an audience who freely appreciate a performance from a single, distant perspective and are unfamiliar with the circle.

The space between the rondavell and up to the cattle kraal in rural dwellings is one of the most sacred performance spaces known as *isibaya*<sup>13</sup>. Legend has it that this space is so sacred that only those who are related by blood with the family are allowed to step within or perform rituals of any kind in it.

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<sup>13</sup> A Xhosa cattle enclosure



Returning to the gender significance of the circle, culturally the circle represents amongst other things a separation of males from females. It sets a silent boundary between husband and wife, sons and daughters, fathers and daughters and mothers and sons. The ability to see individual cultural roles, firstly in the family, strengthens one's identity with the world. That identity is strengthened by the relationship between brothers and sisters, similarly to their sister, aunts, and grandmothers and vice versa. This is in line with the teachings of the culture, so that both boys and girls have a close relationship with their mother. Later these are the same people that juniors of both sexes get guidance from into adulthood. Zenani places her tale at the heart of social responsibilities that *Mbengu-Sonyangaza ndakwenz'int'embali!* explores (Tshazibane 2006a). In other words the politics that come with the circle match those that Zenani is addressing with the herstory of Nojikolo.

### **Gender ideas from Nojikolo's perspective**

The creativity of African women in storytelling, in this case Zenani, suggests that female theatre-making can assist women who perform, or see such theatre, to find authentic emancipation. This section examines the rite of passage of the leading character in the story, specifically the 'un-heard of' incident when a King's daughter 'surprises' the traditional cycle of cultural believers by refusing to go into her initiation at the time deemed best by her Father's Kingdom. "*hayi ndiya kuthomba kulo nyaka uzayo mna...andifun' ukuthomba nonyake nje. Ndizothomba kulo nyaka uzayo*" [no, I don't want to be initiated this year. I will go through *uKuthomba* next year.] Zenani chooses not to have any man react to this news and express his opinion about this matter, although it would have been expected for the King to address such a situation. No woman's opinion is heard either, perhaps to show the peacefulness of this Xhosa nation at that time.

Another possibility that needed consideration during rehearsals was that it is possible that in the time in which the story was conceived, Xhosa initiations used similar methods for both girls and boys to bring the young into adulthood. Today boy's initiation is still practiced and encouraged although it might not be exactly the same as before Eurocentricity penetrated even the furthest reaches of South Africa. However, it is still a landmark for boys to graduate into manhood and is intended therefore to shape a more mature identity. Initiation psychologically prepares the initiate for a long time coming. But if the boys are so prepared for

adulthood, why aren't the girls or sisters, or cousins, and even distant cousins being so prepared? Is this one of the things that the culture has latterly ignored with regard to the girl-child, who is later nevertheless expected to fulfill all the stipulated roles demanded of womanhood?

Could it be that this initiation has also been affected by modern times? It makes sense for this Princess to postpone her initiation if *iNtonjane* was similar to *uMkhwetha*.<sup>14</sup> In other words, if the initiation into womanhood involve a painful cutting of part of the reproductive organs, isolation from males, fasting etc., then it might be correct to assume that the young Princess was scared. Zenani maintains this character's dignity by not revealing anything regarding other people's responses. However initiation remains a respected event, as is the case in some other parts of Africa (Mbiti, 1991). In order to highlight the relevance or even awareness of this, the production included a discussion session in which, amongst the questions asked, was whether the audience felt this initiation into womanhood was still necessary and relevant. In all the performances the answer that came from older women audience members was mostly 'yes'. And they gave similar reasons for why they thought so.

In the production the Princess is not portrayed in a negative light, although her words reject the initiation. Nothing is said about her un-ready-ness being disappointing. In the production the Princess rejects her initiation standing in the middle of the other girls. This speaks to the fact that such initiations, even among the boys, are undergone by a significant number of initiates. This would imply that hundreds of initiates make the occasion even more memorable by going for initiation at the same time as the heir to the throne. If the initiation is rejected, as it was the case here, the consequences could be that many girls show respect and wait to join the princess when she elects that the time has come. However in this tale a King's daughter upsets the traditional cycle by refusing to go to initiation.

Issues of gender are considered by the storyteller Zenani in the manner that she uses to tell the tale. Legend teaches us to respect our parents and fear our fathers but this girl does not, and yet the storyteller vocalizes nobody's response or viewpoint to the girl's decision. Zenani withholds information and chooses to tell the story her way - as any storyteller would and just like any tale would take shape from village to village. The crux of the matter is that the culture is patriarchal and

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<sup>14</sup> uMkhwetha is a Xhosa male initiate

mostly nobody disrespects a parent, especially a father in public. Perhaps Zenani does not reveal the fallout from the daughter's decision to show how peaceful this Kingdom was, when mobilizing large numbers of initiates discouraged fears of such rites of passage. The culture teaches life lessons by stripping off clothing garments, painting the body and inflicting pain on the body so that the lesson will remain in the initiate's memory. Xhosa culture provides visible personal scars for the initiate so the lesson is forever apparent throughout their cycle of life.

This research intends to recoup such cultural values, relook at their supposed meanings so as to be able to discern the reasons behind certain behaviors at a particular time.

*“kufuneka sokutheza kwelaa hlathi kungangenawayo kulo 'khe sibone le nto yoyikwayo kwelo hlathi...elaa hlathi lineenkuni gqitha.”*

[we should go and find wood in that forbidden forest. So that we can see what it is that people are scared of there...that forest has lots of wood]. This scene was purposefully constructed to interpret what the lines are saying, instead of favoring the sexual connotation that resides in words like 'forbidden forest' and 'lots of wood'. The more so because the princess is later rescued and comes back with a child, so the sexual insinuation becomes tempting. However the theatre-maker intended to create images of women as fully developed characters. This can be seen as the same intent that led to the make-up designed for the female members of the cast. Women's bodies were painted with *iSibane esivuthayo* [a burning lamp] in mind. Hence the use of white ochre from the chest down to the toes and red ochre from the neck up to the roots of the hair on their heads. The blood redness at the beginning dries out and as it becomes more fire than blood the story moves to its end. The blood redness is inherited from the redness of the old leather skirt that hangs over the performer's heads at the beginning and during the majority of the production. The skirt's redness chiefly depicts a woman's menstrual cycle that determined the right age for a Xhosa girl to become *iNtonjane*. Also, the body painting was to depict an initiate as an enlightened young African female.

The third aspect to discuss in this section is once again the daughter's avoidance of this initiation. Note, Zenani keeps referring to the Princess even after she has come back to the world of normal people as Nojikolo, which is a married woman's name. Perhaps this indicates the respect given to any married woman, no matter

that she is married to an animal-man, as was Nojikolo. After her brother Mbengu-Sonyangaza had returned home with his sister Nojikolo,

*kwaphunywa ke phandle ke kwabulelwa kwenziwa umbulelo waloo  
nto...kwaxhelwa inkabi yenkomo...ukuhlanjwa loo nto yaloo  
ntombazana...ngoku ke kwabonakala okokuba ke le ntombazana ke yaye  
kakade ke iyintombi ekwakusithiwa mayithombe...yaye yathi yon'  
andikafuni kuthomba...ngoku ke kulungile mayithombe...ithe ke kwa yona  
ndifuna ke ndibhek' emboleni kuqala...*

[a celebration begins to welcome them. A cow is slaughtered to wash away her misfortune. Here, it became apparent after all that she was meant to undergo initiation. Now that things are back to normal she should. However she said, 'I want to go and get the *Mbola* (ochre) first'...].

This time the Princess' procrastination about going through this rite of passage proves to be one that her whole society would pay for. She goes on to demand: '*ndifuna la maphakathi wam ezaa ntombi zazizi ntombi ngokuya...zazilishumi...*'[I want my countesses, those that were part of the ten girls ...]

The wish is granted, even though it meant that those 'girls', who now were married and living in their own houses with their families, respond as she wishes and accompany her to a place where this ochre is found. Peace is maintained all the way and there are no signs of tension, until her sister *Nomavo* declines: '*hayi andinakukhapha-mna mntu, eli xesha ebusuku ndiyoyika...*'[I cannot accompany anyone at this time of the evening, I'm scared].

This acknowledgement of cowardice proves to be the reason for Nojikolo to show her strength for the first time. It is an act that leads to lies, and the destruction of that fire, which is the mother, in the ten homes that these women came from. The King orders for the women to be killed. The audience is confronted by the dead bodies of women who have been judged to have had disobeyed the King. This heavy sentence is highlighted in the production because it is the first time the King ever speaks out to his people. Somehow Zenani suggests that when powerful men speak of women it is mainly to destroy them. Whatever the reason, where another storyteller might choose to twist a certain aspect, this adaptation stuck to the script.

Hearsay has it that Xhosa Ntsomi male tales often have a bloody content. It is possible that Zenani kept the men silent to allow the female empowerment to be stronger and not be overshadowed by male energy. The stage adaptation kept as close as possible to the way she narrated the tale and emphasized those places where performance element could enhance the visual impact. At this point in the adaptation the three men “cut” the necks of all fourteen girls, surrounded by musical accompaniment.

Apart from this episode, Mbengu-Sonyangase is a very positive tale. The impact of the image of many dead young women is powerful, but when this episode is considered against the positive aspects of the story, a more balanced understanding of the tale’s meaning is achieved. For example, not often do stories of a patriarchal society tell of a young princess who is allowed to refuse her parent’s wishes for her to go through *iJaka* [rite of passage for adolescent girls]. The leading character is placed on a pedestal throughout the tale, even when her decision-making negatively affects those around her. In the production, her countesses go on their knees and bow their heads down when she speaks to them. They refer to her as, Nkosazana [Princess] all the time, even after they all went through their initiation and although she goes missing and returns years later with a child - to a society that disapproved of such things. All her efforts to stall going through *iJaka* fail until the negative occurrences in her life teach her that the ceremony is clearly unavoidable. However, she remains respected regardless of the “bad” choices that she made earlier in her life.

Although the aim of this story is to show the importance of *iJaka*, through the mistakes of this royal woman, it is not bitterly narrated. This could be because Zenani chose to speak of this princess with respect, as it possibly could be the case in a matriarchal society. This was demonstrated in the respectful manner in which the storytellers address the princess. When narrating about the Queen or the Princess, whoever the storyteller at that juncture is, the speaker must bow to her as a sign of respect. This influenced the style of the production and was used, amongst other reasons, to negate negative depictions of African women. Whereas a patriarchal society teaches that the ruling gender (male) is always right. Another reason for the frequent bowing was to rouse the energy of the female performers in the production. All the female characters were portrayed in a positive light and in a classical manner.

Nojikolo says to her sister and their subjects: '*Xa ungandikhaphiyo ke ndiyaya, ndiyazincama. Mamelan'aphake; ndizakwenza lento. Ndizakugxumeka lo mkhonto apha phantsi. Ukuba ndiye ndakhubeka ndawa, uyakuwa uphinde uvuke. Ukuba ndifile, uyakuwa angavuki, ze nihambe ke*'. [Well, if you cannot accompany me then I'll take a chance. Listen you all, here's what I'll do. I will thrust this spear of mine in the ground. If I trip and fall, this spear will fall flat and get back up again. If I'm dead, it will fall and not get back up again. You must go home then.]

Here Zenani re-aligns African woman with magic, or special, powers. However, Nomavo and the rest of the women (no longer girls here according to the story) leave the very moment the spear falls. This action weakens Nojikolo's special powers as it reflects doubt on the part of the women including her royal blood sister. Being without her spear renders Nojikolo vulnerable enough to be caught by another mountain male man-eater from whom she cannot save herself. Zenani reduces the power of this man-eater by making him follow the smell of both raw and cooked meat that comes from Nojikolo's home where the magic powers of her community overcome the creature's stupidity. Zenani completes the tale by with magical realism to amplify the relationship Africans have with animals by a call to '*izilwanyana zonke zomhlaba mazise aph*' [all the dangerous animals known to men in the world must get here]. Zenani uses expletive language in relation to the man-eater, which affirms female gender empowerment in her story as the males are equated to being vulgar in this woman's world.

### **The spoken word**

After hearing Zenani's actual voice and then reading and interpreting the transcribed versions of her tale, the theatre-making interpretation had to try and bring the sound of an ancient female voice into the production (2006a). Zenani's spoken word initiated my preparations for this production. Whenever she narrated this, or any other of her tales, my realization grew of how powerful her spoken text is.

Whenever she finished her storytelling *uMakhulu* undertakes a diagnosis of the story by seeking the moral of the story from her audience. This aspect of the process was developed into a debate within the production. This became an opportunity for the theatre-maker to address whatever impulses had prompted the direction that the production took. It provides an immediate response from the

audience and informs the theatre-maker if the themes he is addressing are important, or of any relevance, to society as represented by the audience.

The following questions were asked in the production debate in which a girl-child in character stands up and addresses her audience.

1. *Ingaba ndinalo ilungelo lokuzimyanya nomntu oyileyo esuthwini ndibe mna ndingakhange ndithombe?* [Am I allowed to marry a man who has gone through the rite of passage into manhood, when I have not gone through mine into womanhood?]

The answer from the audience was yes. Some added that when something is not going well in your marriage, such as for instance you cannot bear children; you should come back to the place where you were born and go through initiation.

Most important is the reason these particular questions were asked. This question is informed by an initiated Xhosa male who has been given a mandate to marry but finds it difficult, because the girl of his dreams, who is not initiated into womanhood, will not receive the maximum respect from other married women who have been. This question speaks to the idea that, just like manhood, womanhood is gained in a specific way according to culture. This question carries symptoms of a girl's self-doubt, and would not be asked by a girl who has been through *uKuthomba*. In the tale, Zenani creates the notion that the uninitiated daughter does end up in marriage. However, her partner is possibly a monster that lives off people, and not a man of respect. In Nojikolo's case, she was rescued by her brother and had had two children with a King of cannibals.

2. *Kule mihla siphila kuyo ingaba sikhona isidingo sokungenisa umntana eJakeni?* [Is this rite of passage still a necessity nowadays?]

This question was asked in order to see if the audience thought initiation would benefit the image and self worth of African women today. First, the majority of youth in the audience confessed to knowing little or nothing about such initiations. Whereas the presence of older women in the audience, familiar with this cultural rite, confirmed Zenani's views revealed in the tale that initiation was necessity. The absence of the knowledge and practice of this initiation undermines the African woman's role in society. Ironically, the expectations have not changed but the training has been removed. What is the view of initiated African women on uninitiated African women? What are the benefits of *iNtonjane* for Xhosa girls? Is

the dominance of Western cultural influences creating a new identity for African women? What is the identity of an African woman in post-apartheid South Africa? Again, whilst African and European men are initiated differently, what are the steps towards African womanhood? Are they any different to European women? The broader question which these questions suggest is; what makes an African woman? Is it the melanin in her skin or is it her way of life?

3. *Ngowuphi umzali othi xa etshabile lisokole ikhaya?* [Which one of the two parents' death is the more likely to undermine the family unit?]

This question highlights the imbalances of this society that ignores the young African woman's upbringing by neglecting to initiate girls and later expecting them to fit into the roles of womanhood. The reason for this rhetorical question was first literally to take time to praise a woman by asking the obvious, and also to acknowledge the role of women in the family.

If the family depends on its women to survive, so does society. Why has the upbringing of Xhosa girls been neglected or disregarded? How is a Xhosa society supposed to thrive if the girls are not brought up accordingly, when in the end society depends on them? Where are Xhosa matriarchs supposed to come from if they have not been given the know-how from older generations of women and incorporated into the broader society as it was previously done? The more such institutions are looked down upon, the more the society fails to see the value of a girl child. Institutions like *iJaka* did not only benefit the girls who were learning about what they were possibly going to face in their lives as African women in a world with African men, but also served as an opportunity for women who were facing challenging times time to get away from their problems for a time and receive advice from the women who visited *iNtonjane*.

### **Word as harmony**

One of the components of Xhosa storytelling tradition is *uKombhela*,<sup>15</sup> and this music added to the argument the young women were addressing at given times. Where storytelling needed to be dramatized *uKombhela* became the answer. The songs also played a role, as characters in the tale could have confused the audience. So, instead of having a crab, as it is in Zenani's tale, *wadidiyela*

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<sup>15</sup> Xhosa traditional singing that constitutes improvisation of overlapping voices that together form a one long harmonious song



*uNonkala ngasemlanjeni* was sung.<sup>16</sup> This song is also popular for its continuous use by those whose family totem resides in the river. This song connects three themes together; directly addressing an audience member, physical expression in terms of dance and song, as a character is addressed as the crab. The physical expression of this song meant that ‘performers have a different space, ‘they exist in a charmed circle, and this is part of their power’ (Gunner, 2001:118). This stage became a platform for the ignored Xhosa teenager to confront both parents with her girlhood, using song. This idea was derived from the manner in which Nojikolo informed her family about her whereabouts, while hidden inside ‘*the thing’s*’ bag. Nojikolo sang every time ‘the thing’ commanded ‘his bird’ to sing; ‘*uthi mandithini, mandithini, Bentsel'-esangweni, ndahamba ndayilimal' endlu ntshana kabawo! Noluhlu, akundipheleki? Ntshiiiiiii-ngantsoooooo-oo! Nomavo, akundipheleki? Ntshiiiiiii-ngantsoooooo-oo!*’ [What shall I do? Oh, what shall I do? My actions have buried my family to the ground. Noluhlu, won’t you come with me? Nomavo, will you not come with me? Oh my, oh my!] (Zenani 2006a).

The song uses a Xhosa idiom; *bents’elesangweni*. The idiom offers an image of a woman sitting with her private parts facing the doorway. A familiar understanding of indigenous patriarchy perceives this to be an act of rebellion or a bad omen that worked against the teachings that women should sit in a more respectful manner (Gunner 2001). If the Xhosa dwelling place has to face the direction of the rising sun then it is possible to see the magnitude of the insult *his* worshippers took and to whom this song is addressed. Perhaps Zenani’s lyrics allude to Nojikolo’s acceptance of insulting the “gods” through her actions. In this production as a result, the young women used their bodies in any manner they saw fit without restrictions, but as a celebration of a gift from the African female theatre “god”. The stage brought reminders why in this society, ‘acting itself is still, however, a profession which fathers try to prevent their daughters from following’ (Gunner, 2001:117).

The songs address the audience with content to familiarize them with *intonjane*, such as, *Sontombi ndithethelele, sontombi ndiyaliwa ngamasoka* [big sister help, I have male problems]. This is the first song in the production and is sung by the chorus as the audience enters. The lyrics are used as dialogue between the initiates and the older women who educate *iNtonjane* about womanhood.

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<sup>16</sup> Xhosa traditional healer’s song sung for those ancestors that are believed to live in the river.

*iNtonjane* is traditionally considered to be a girls' 'school' where questions relating to men in women's lives are addressed. In the production this song is sung with girls holding reeds to express their sexual purity.

This theme is further dealt with in the discussion, where a question of whom to get married to is raised and is discussed by use of another girl's song; *Ndineyam' intwana aph'emaGiqweni* [I have my boy from this *Giqwa* clan]. This was to tap more deeply into the nature of *iNtonjane* that is best described by Erlank: 'During these, young girls and boys indulged in a non-penetrative sexual play called *ukumetsha*<sup>17</sup>, which the missionaries reviled for permitting sexual relations between children and for its echoes of the biblical sin of Onan (in this case, masturbation)' (2003:943). A similar song *Ngamahomba ngamahilihili*. [they dress up and disappear] was also used although it is not from Zenani's tale, but addresses similar themes. The lyrics speak to the girls of this village (in this case, the audience) who dress themselves up and go to places like theatres or clubs and so the song was addressing 'loose women' (Gunner, 2001:116).

*Uhambo* [the journey] is another song that was used to speak of the journey and its challenges that being an African woman involves. This song is a traditional healer's song that gives hope and strength to women to confront whatever they are faced with.

Some songs were added to evoke the atmosphere and feeling quality of a scene and to capture action, such as '*wayibulala inj' emnyama*' [you killed the black dog]. This song is sung to emphasize the impact of the killing of the woman that lied to the King. The lyrics are a lament to the killer of 'a black dog' who acts without mercy. This is the price that eventually sees the princess taking her place as an initiate that she has been avoiding. This position reiterates Zenani's argument about the unavoidable nature of this initiation for Xhosa women. Had that not been the case, innocent characters such as Nomavo, who is killed by her own brother Mbengu-Sonyangaza, could have been saved. Nojikolo's freedom to choose destroyed many lives and it is her reluctance towards this initiation that makes it seem as if *iNtonjane* is very similar to *uKwaluka*. If such is the case, then perhaps the Princess should have been dealt with differently to suit her state of being.

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<sup>17</sup> Ukumetsha is the custom that allows pre-marital sexual relations, without sexual penetration, in teenagers.

Some songs were added to lighten the mood, as in the case of '*Zincinci, zincinci iimpundu zomkakho*' [they are small, your wife's bums are small]. This is a humorous woman's song and is mocking a married man about the small size of his wife's buttocks.

The songs played a vital role in this production and put everything into perspective. In all of the above ways songs become an indispensable element of storytelling. The songs that were added were deliberately included in this production to take Zenani's argument further, by dramatizing the actual initiation and to fulfill the performance quality of *iNtsomi*.

### **On the mythical realm**

This section examines how costume, props, stage lighting, set design and ritual were used to construct a timeless realm of Xhosa myth and story. The set design is a circle, resembling the floor of a rondavell, painted light orange in order to illuminate the actors by bouncing light off the circular floor onto the performer's bodies. The circular performance area was representative of the moon and taken to be a woman's world and that of the production where she can live without the patriarchal pressures.

The whole cast is topless, with the girl's upper bodies painted white ochre up until their necks and their hair was covered with red ochre. The half nudity was an expression of a freedom the girls are not allowed to freely exercise in a patriarchal society that planet earth is. The ten chorus girls form a circle around the stage and dance facing the center of the circle. This is the start of what becomes a greeting the space ritual and it continues like that for a while until all audience members are seated. Here the performance is linked to the fire that is the central point of the stage. The ritual ends when the performers kneel around this fireplace. Above their heads the Xhosa skirt hangs suspended, which is later eliminated by the actions of the chorus.

Outside the circle the seven male and female performers meet for the first time. Four of these are girls whose roles are to portray the characters in the tale and carry much of the dialogue. They join the circle, also paying the same respect to the space and the skirt as the chorus has done.

The burning of *impepho* [wild sage], which is customarily expected to fill the space with its scent in most Xhosa ancestral ritual performances and theatre, is used in

this production to cleanse the performance space before the awaiting audience. However, it is also assumed that it will appease the performer's and audience member's ancestors who are most likely to 'arrive' and disturb the performance of a cast member.

The most significant aspect of the set design was the hanging skirt. This is an old leather skirt worn by married Xhosa women. This symbolized everything about the production, including the age for Xhosa girls' initiation, which dates back to a time when skirts and beads informed their traditional dress. The skirt created an energy that can be matched to that of an African woman. It was also there to embed her presence in our minds and to place her above everything on earth. The ability to make the skirt rise and descend was informed by the desire to acknowledge the African woman as a goddess that was being respected and commemorated by the storytelling event this production was. It is easy to agree with Mutwa when he says 'there was a time in early African history when the Old Tribes worshiped women' (1969:157). The idea was to have a visible and invisible character move within the world of the play. The skirts remained part of the performance of *Mbengu-Sonyangaza ndakwenz'int'embu!* and served as an emblem that salutes African women from the distant past until now.

## CONCLUSION

So what is this research about? The intention is to develop a method of working with black female performers with a text that hopefully would become increasingly meaningful to their personal lives.<sup>18</sup> The intention is to use theatre to challenge the patriarchal systems that appear to oppress African women in post-apartheid South Africa, and to find a theatre-making voice that mainly addresses African cultural issues. I intended to emphasize the importance and hence the need, for an African matriarchal orientation in society by addressing African womanist issues with this theatre-making research. I sought to find a useful and workable role for an African theatre-maker in the post-apartheid South Africa by addressing womanist issues first.

If Xhosa girls were to go for initiation then perhaps greater significance would be accorded African women in the culture. Married women and men are more respected in the Xhosa cultural-practicing societies and of those who are married,

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<sup>18</sup> Whilst there were male performers in the thesis production, the research orientation is the focus of this explication, rather than every aspect of the production,

those who have been through this initiation *eJakeni* or *eBhomeni*, receive a larger share of respect. I suspect that it tends to be such initiated, married women who further develop and become traditional poets, healers, and royal leaders in this society. Children should not simply be separated according to gender and left to fend for themselves but rather to learn the complementary significance of their respective roles from role models in a united society.

If Nojikolo had come from an ordinary home and not of royal blood, she might have seen no possibility to postpone her initiation, as children of the royal house are expected to lead by example with “good manners”. This is exemplified in a report on the behavior of Princess Sikhanyiso of Swaziland. The report states:

In 2001, Mswati III instituted the *Umchwasho* – a traditional chastity rite – in Swaziland as a means of combating the AIDS epidemic. The princess became a focus of controversy, as, while she was staying abroad, she was not bound by the strictures of the *umchwasho*. While studying abroad, Princess Sikhanyiso has developed a reputation for ignoring or rebelling against her native country’s tradition. Sikhanyiso wears Western-styled jeans and miniskirts, something women in Swaziland are discouraged from doing. (Sikhanyiso Dlamini, 2012)<sup>19</sup>

Also, she possibly would have had no chance to receive the honor of being accompanied by married women to get *imbhola* as there would be more than one girl in the village being initiated into womanhood ready to go get the white ochre for themselves. Can Nojikolo’s decision to postpone her initiation be interpreted as her not wanting to “grow up”? The production was investigating whether this society saw this Xhosa-girl’s initiation as a necessary step into womanhood. The theme came from the word for girl, *intombazana*. The investigative question from the young female performers about the significance of becoming *intonjane*, and if and how it helps construct their Xhosa womanhood and identity, was fed by this theme.

The beauty about this tale is that it carries very little negativity, especially in the light of considering African women in a South African theatre. The opportunity to direct a cast of seventeen females with three males in a provocative and challenging tale and engage in a debate about the current face of the black girl in today’s society could not have come at a better time. The theatre making ability to

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<sup>19</sup> Umchwasho is a traditional chastity rite in Swaziland. While the rite is active, unmarried women are not allowed to have sexual relations and must wear a traditional set of tassels.

get an immediate response from an audience meant there is a place for such theatre in this society. It did not go unnoticed that little is known by the audience about Xhosa royalty and culturally specific topics.

There was a huge imbalance in the debate in which older Xhosa women readily participated, whilst there was little response from older Xhosa men. Perhaps this is because in this tale Zenani focuses on the women more positively and the male characters often tend to be of a destructive nature. *AmaGongqongqongqo*<sup>20</sup> are males, Mbengu-Sonyangaza is a male and kills all *amaGongqongqongqo*, with one thrust of his spear on one member of the *Gongqongqo* army, to take Nojikolo back to their father and King. The scene of men who killed the ten married women and Nomavo after they lied about Nojikolo's presence in her own initiation was informed by this realization in Zenani's tale. The '*thing*' that captured Nojikolo is also male.<sup>21</sup> 'This thing' had married three wives whom it lives with, and was still clever enough to think Nojikolo was all the dangerous animals inside his bag that he had carried home after fetching water for the King. Mbengu-Sonyangaza is also male and the only 'brother' that does a good deed by rescuing Nojikolo twice from different man-eaters. In the adaptation he is the same brother that kills his sister Nomavo because the King instructs that all eleven women be killed. The male characters were not created to denigrate men, nor to make African women hate or fear all African men. Rather men are part of the story and were presented as such characters because they exist, possibly within every society.

*Mbengu-Sonyangaza ndakwenz'int'emb!* suggests that Xhosa girls need to claim and reclaim their voice and role in today's society firstly by graduating into a more senior cultural statuses such as iJaka (Tshazibane 2012). It is status which restores a woman's dignity amongst the man and women in her cultural vicinity. Perhaps this is still a viewpoint from a patriarchal perspective but that does not take away the fact that Xhosa women are initiated into womanhood less and less and yet expected to fulfill adult roles with exemption. This essay argues that there is still a valid place for such cultural schooling in this new South Africa and aims to find a theatre-making dimension in order both to uphold and challenge the cultural value systems, as people are adapting over time.

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<sup>20</sup> Human-eating jungle people that captured the princess who would become Nojikolo.

<sup>21</sup> Referred to as 'laa nto' [that thing] by Zenani

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